

Jim Johnson

Prior to being named the NFL Commissioner, Paul Tagliabue served as an NFL legal counselor out of the Washington office for two decades. An avid NFL fan, Tagliabue held Redskins season tickets and witnessed first hand the great performances of John Riggins. Commissioner Tagliabue is here today to serve as John Riffin's presenter for induction. Welcome Paul Tagliabue.

Paul Tagliabue

Thank you, thank you. Whenever John Riggins was handed the ball and smashed his way through the line of scrimmage, the voices of teammates, fans and broadcasters seemed to rise as one. He could go all the way. Riggins could go all the way. Today as we see you John sitting there along side Lem Barney, John Mackey and Al Davis we can say with them Riggins as gone all the way. All the Way to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Before becoming commissioner I was a Washingtonian, and NFL fan and a Redskin season ticket holder, they took the tickets away from me

now, so that the Raiders and others don't think I am bias. I was among the many who cheered for John Riggins as he plowed through Giants and Cowboys and Bears and Dolphins and 49ers in the playoffs. I stand here today on behalf of the fans especially Redskins and Jets fans who sat in the stands and watched on television and cheered and marveled at the achievements of John Riggins. He has the unique ability to relate to people and to entertain them on and off the football field. On it he was a rare combination of power and speed. The diesel, the diesel, the diesel. He rolled for over 13,000 yards and 116 touchdowns in 14 seasons. Off the field, he was a wonderfully rare, free spirit who made people think because he usually saw more things than they did and he made them laugh at the same time. Whether he was sporting a different hair cut or a top hat and tails to a team Super Bowl party or a camouflage wardrobe as the leader of Ringo's Rangers, whether it was taking a mid field bow after another great performance, practicing in work boots, saying upon his return to football following a one year sabbatical, I'm bored, I'm broke and I'm back. Or whether it was giving advise to the Supreme Court and John, John Sandy Baby did appreciate those roses, John Riggins with his mischievous grin and twinkling eyes had a gift of making you think and smile.

But John Riggins is not sitting here today because he was a maverick or a rebel or a free spirit, John is here because he was a great football player who played the game with skill, power and intensity. If there was 61 minutes in the game, he would have played the 61st minute. Beneath the celebrated instinct for merriment, this was a hard working, hard nosed, big, fast, powerful fullback with a heart and accomplishments of a champion. That is the definition of a Hall of Famer. So to the list of All-time classic fullbacks, Bronko Nagurksi, Marion Motley, John Henry Johnson, Jim Taylor, Jim Brown and Larry Csonka, Hall of Famers all we now officially add John Riggins. He called himself a simple country boy because he grew up in Centralia, KS population 500 .. no street signs there, but there was never a need for street signs in John's career. He always knew where he was going and he challenged his teammates to follow. John's family is here today and he is not the only member to stand in a national spotlight. John's brother Frank played the outfield for the California Angels many years ago and you might remember his mother Mildred who starred in 1979 with John in a heartwarming United Way NFL television message. I want to ask Mildred and Gene to stand up and say hello to the crowd, Mr. & Mrs. Riggins.

John's Hall of Fame potential became evident in high school and at the University of Kansas. There he broke the rushing records of another future Pro Football Hall of Famer Gale Sayers. John was All Big 8, all American and he never missed a game or practice. In 1971 as a rookie, John led the NFL Jets in rushing and receiving and he realized what he sometimes said was his biggest thrill in sports, seeing himself on a bubble gum card. Much bigger thrills were to come for John, that's for sure. He became the first Jets player to rush for 1,000 yards in a season in 1975. He was named team MVP and a pro bowl player. In 1976 John signed with Washington where he played for nine seasons. It was then that I sat in the endzone, we had a bunch of diesel fans around us and they all wore railroad clothes to the stadium. I sat in the endzone and was privileged

enough to watch John Riggins reach his peak both as a individual performer and as a leader of a championship team. He led the Redskins to Super Bowls in 1982 and 1983. With the blocking of his beloved hogs, Jacoby, Grimm, May, Bostic and Stark, he scored 24 touchdowns in 1983 an NFL record that still stands. During the play-offs he was unstoppable. I am sure you remember I am sure he was the most valuable player in Super Bowl XVII, rushing a Super Bowl record 38 times for 166 yards lifting the Redskins to the first of their three super bowl victories. He was then the cornerstone of a special era in Washington that is still thriving and continuing. The Joe Gibbs era truly began with a hand off to John Riggins. Like most great players, John's career closed with great numbers. In fourteen NFL seasons he gained more than 11,000 yards in rushing and another 2,000 yards receiving. His 116 career touchdowns placed him third all-time behind Jim Brown and Walter Payton. He ranks today as the sixth leading rusher in the history of the NFL. But with John as with so many great players including Lem Barney and John Mackey, it is not the numbers, it's the man and his moments. He once said and I can quote him "everything I have done has been in fun. I see myself as an entertainer and the football field is my stage. If there wasn't anyone in the stadium I wouldn't be there. What makes it fun is the cheering of the crowd, the fans." John from one of those in the crowd who cheered I take the opportunity to say thank you from all of us, we appreciated what you did and you made it fun. Thank you. Some of you know because you have seen him perform in his new career. This year as he enters the Hall of Fame John has started a new career as an actor. It began with glowing reviews in suburban Washington. Knowing John's flair for the dramatic, would it really surprise anyone if someday he steps forward to accept an Oscar at the Academy Awards. But there is the future, today is for honoring the past so now I have the privilege of all fans particularly Redskins and Jets fans to present for induction into the Hall of Fame, the diesel John Riggins.

John Riggins

Thank you Mr. Commissioner. Thank you very much. It is indeed a pleasure to be here, but we have been here too long and I am going to make this brief. I do have a speech and it is a glorious one but you will not get to hear it this afternoon, written copies can be received if you call my secretary the number is 703-blah-blah..... Actually, I am not going to bore you guys I am going to cut straight to the chase as they say. I am very fortunate to be here, very fortunate indeed. Got all the votes that had to be necessary. Everybody wonders why did I get the commissioner to introduce me, Madonna had a headache.

Looking back on the glorious moments I encountered during my 14 seasons in the NFL, my most vivid and heartfilled memories I am standing on the field before each game singing the national anthem. That was a very special time for me. I realized how fortunate I was to be in the United States of America. And I realized the sacrifices that others made that I might be where I was. In particular, I thought of the men and women of

Viet Nam. They will always hold a special place in my heart. There is nothing I can say that will ever rewrite that particular chapter of history, but I want you guys to know and you gals to know, I will never forget you and your guys are my heroes.

Now I have shot my speech and I suppose you are wondering why I have started out this way, but I will get to that in a moment. Motivation plays a role in all our endeavors and I have to admit for me motivation was not always consistent. I viewed the game through the wide starry eyes of a youth when I first came into it. In reality that just is not the way it is my friends. This is a business. And the only thing that really makes it a game is the competition that burns in the athletes that play on Sunday afternoon. For me there was one special time from the kick off to the final gun on each Sunday afternoon. I went into each game with the urge to succeed and the fear that I might fail. Realization of a high risk involved in going on the field each time is what got my adrenalin going. Players all thrive on that pressure and we miss that desperation when we leave. I am very happy to serve in 14 campaigns in the NFL and come out on the other side with few flesh wounds. Professional football is a serious business and while I enjoy the thrill of the game on the field I became quite cognizant that the players seldom win. For every star player who benefits there are hundreds probably thousands who don't enjoy the fortuitous opportunities and do not survive the system. We all go into each game not knowing whether or not it will be our last and that maybe the scariest part of all. Robert Service wrote a poem entitled "The Law of the Yukon" and I want you to bear with me because I am going to try to recite and I am going to recite a few stanzas of this poem because to me and to these men who stand behind me this is what we do for a living and try to entertain you and this is the system, this is the game that we play.

This is the law of the Yukon and ever she makes it plain, send not your foolish and evil send me your strong and your sane. Strong the red rage of battle, sane for I hear them soar. Send me men girth for the combat, men who are grit to the core. Swift as a panther in triumph, fierce as a bear in defeat, sired to a bull-dog parrot. Steeled in the furnace heat. Send me the best of your breeding, lend me your chosen one, them will I take to my bosom, them will I call my sons. Them I will guild with my treasures, them I will glut with my meat but the others, the misfits, the failures, them I trample under my feet. Desolate, damned and despairable, crippled, impulsied and slain, ye would spend me the spon of your gutters. Go take back your spon again, wild and wide were my borders. Stern as death is my sleigh for my ruthless throne I have ruled alone for a million years and a day. Hugging my mighty treasures, waiting for man to come but he swept like a turbid torrent and after him swept the scum. The pallet pimp of the deadline, the innovative of him, one by one I weeded them out for all that I sought was men. One by one I dismayed them, frighten them soar with my glooms, one by one I betrayed them and to my manifold doomed. Drowning them like rats in my rivers, starved them like curs on my plains, robbed the flesh that was left them, poisoned the blood in their veins. Burst with my winter upon them searing forever in their sight, splash them with

fungus white faces, whimpering while in the night. Wild and wide are my borders, stern is death is my sleigh and I wait for the men who will win me and I will not be won in a day. And I will not be won by weaklings, cuddled, suave and mild, but by men with the hearts of Vikings and the simple faith of a child. Desperate, strong and resistant, unthrottled by fear or defeat, them I will guild with my treasurers them I will glut with my meat. Loftily I stand from each sisterland patient and weary wise, the wait of the world of sadness in my quiet passionless eyes. Dreaming alone of the people, dreaming alone of the day when men shall not rape my riches and curse me to go away. Making abode of my bounty, bowing the hand that gave until I rise in my wrath and I sweep on their path and I stamp them into the grave. Dreaming of men who will bless me of women esteemingly good of children born in my borders of radiant motherhood. Of cities leaping to stature of fame like a flag unfurled. As I pour the tide of my riches in the eager lap of the world, this is the law of the Yukon that only the strong shall thrive that surely the weak shall perish and only the fit survive. Desolate, damned and despairable, crippled, impulsied and slain, this is the will of the Yukon, low how she makes it plain.

There are many people who helped me along the way, there are those of you who have challenged my courage, those of you who have challenged my talent, those of you who have challenged my integrity and those of you who have challenged my insanity. To all of you I say thank you. I have always enjoyed rising to a challenge perhaps growing up in Kansas prepared me for those who said "show me." Proving myself under pressure has been a way of life for me. I have often been portrayed as a fellow who marches to a beat of a different drummer. I am not so sure that is true. I think anyone here would have performed in the same manner as I had they faced the same circumstances...okay...except for the Mohawk. But what separates me from everyone else in my opinion is that I had the courage to stand alone. To me that maybe life's biggest principal and I have saved the best for last and this is the part where it could get a little sticky. But there is obviously some people in your life that are always there for you and to them I think we all owe the biggest debt of gratitude and it is certainly no different in my case. So with that I just want to say thank you mom and dad I love you both very much and, of course, you both know what you have done for me you wanted something for your children than you didn't have and your worked hard to insure that. Of course, the stage would have been easier but I will still get a shot at that. I also want to thank my four children, Bobbie, Portia, Emil and Libby who inspired me to push myself onward at times when I needed an extra shove, I love you guys a lot as well. And to everybody else I say, if I have offended you over the years, I really hadn't meant to, I've tried to be honest and straight forward in my dealings with people and I feel I have succeeded pretty well with that. As I advise a lot of aspiring young athletes aim high and shoot straight.

There is not only one route to success, my career certainly demonstrates that and in closing I want to leave a little something with you.

Remember, the news of my craziness has been greatly exaggerated. What fools the eye in the perception is that I am the horse of a different color, I am the fruit of a woman's soul, my mothers. Thank you.